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### Impact of accreditation on quality assurance

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## Chapter 7

# Impact of accreditation on public and private universities: A comparative study

**Abstract:** Based on two cycles of assessments for accreditation, the study assesses the differential impacts of accreditation on the quality of public and private universities in Ghana. Statistical tests comparing the two-cycle aggregated assessment scores between the two categories of universities indicated a significant difference; with the public universities, achieving better scores (improvements). From the results of the evaluators' reports and, largely, the results of the opinions of academics from both categories of institutions, the conclusion was that isomorphic pressures, mainly faced by the private universities, accounted for their implementation of suggestions for improvement by the evaluators.

This article is based on:

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## **7.1 Introduction**

This study assesses the differential impacts of accreditation on public and private universities in Ghana after two cycles of assessments, using specified indicators. Impact in this context, is defined as producing effects aimed at conformance with the minimum standards established by the accreditation procedure in Ghana. The five main indicators, which had been assessed and agreed before accreditation was granted, were curriculum structure, library facilities, student/staff ratios, physical facilities and funding. The overall research question is:

Were there differential impacts of accreditation measures on the public and private universities in Ghana, between two evaluations in the period 2006-2012 and what might have accounted for any such differences?

## **7.2 Background to Study**

Accreditation procedures were put in place in Ghana in 1993 following the opening up of tertiary education to include private providers. The relevant legislation, the Provisional National Defence Council Law 317, 1993 (since replaced by Parliamentary Act 744, 2007) required both the 9 public and 40 private universities (as at the time of this study in 2012) to seek accreditation with regard to the contents and standards of their programmes. The establishment of each public university in Ghana is usually preceded by the passage of an enabling act by the legislature, while all prospective private tertiary education institutions are required to apply and go through the accreditation procedure (including institutional accreditation) before commencing operations. Public universities, whose establishment preceded that of the accrediting agency, were required to register and have their existing programmes evaluated for purposes of accreditation while both categories of universities were required to submit each new study programme for evaluation and accreditation before enrolling students on it. In Ghana, programme accreditation is usually valid for three years for new programmes and a maximum of five years for existing programmes. The sheer enormity of the task and challenges, mainly with regard to finances, put off the commencement of the accreditation procedures for the three oldest public universities until the year 2006. Therefore, by the middle of the year 2012, there had been two cycles of

programme assessments in these public universities while the oldest private universities have had three or four assessments.

The accreditation procedure, among other things, requires the private universities to be mentored by autonomous universities running similar programmes before they would be considered for institutional and programme accreditations. The mentor institutions invariably turn out to be public universities, which have been around for some time and which also, derive income from charging the private institutions for their mentoring services. To be permitted to serve as mentor, however, an institution needs to have its own programmes regularly evaluated and accredited. Almost all public universities serve as mentors to non-chartered private universities. These public universities had themselves been mentored in their formative years by reputable universities in the colonial country (the United Kingdom). They are therefore expected to pass on the internalised norms, good university culture and structures governing modern higher education institutions to their mentored institutions.

Public universities in Ghana normally do not have problems attracting good students as they usually receive more applications than their capacity would allow. Good reputation, established over the years, and relatively low fees mainly account for this. Fees paid by students in the public universities are generally regulated and subsidised by the state. The administrators of the public universities, however, complain about the inadequacy of the funds provided for the effective running of their institutions. They, therefore, admit some students, including foreign ones who pay full fees, mainly to assist in making up the shortfall. The inability of the state to fully fund the public universities while putting a cap on the fees those universities can charge as well as the number of full fee-paying students they can admit, severely limits the growth and expansion of these universities. With respect to staffing, relatively stable incomes and good retirement benefits, supported by public funds, put the public universities ahead of the competition.

The private universities have the luxury of admitting full fee-paying students whose numbers are capped only by the available human and physical resources, as regulated by the accreditation procedure. Many of those institutions only offer courses in the humanities, which are popular with students, yet initial and overhead costs are low. Ironically, it is in this area that the public universities mainly recruit full fee-paying

students. Potential students however, would seek the accreditation status of a programme before applying to enrol. The relatively 'unknown' status of the private universities requires them to display always their accreditation certificates in order to attract both academic staff and students. Indeed, most of their teaching staff is made up of part-time or retired academics from the public universities.

Local and foreign funding sources often require evidence of accreditation as a condition for the provision of funding. Private universities usually provide their own funding but those seeking loans from the banks and international sources would normally be required to show proof of their accreditation status. Students from both public and private universities would have access to publicly funded loans only if their institutions and programmes had been registered/accredited.

The foregoing factors are thus some of the key developments that would likely inform and influence the decision by the universities to maintain a clean bill of health with the accreditation procedure. The accreditation procedure also uses these factors as advantage to influence the institutions to maintain minimum standards of quality and, even more importantly, ensure a level of international comparability.

### **7.2.1 Liberalization of Provision of Higher Education in Africa.**

The end of colonial rule, especially in the UK-ruled territories, led to the establishment of a few higher education institutions mainly to prepare a critical mass of educated citizens to assume roles in various levels of governance in these territories. These institutions included the University College of Gold Coast (in Ghana), University College of Ibadan (Nigeria) and Makerere University College (Uganda). Post-colonial governments, realising the important role education played in the socio-economic development of nations, expanded opportunities for access to higher education by, among others, building additional universities and making studying free for students. Economic hardships, arising mainly out of political instability and the consequent imposition of sanctions by donor countries, and the perception by dictatorial regimes of the universities as seats of opposition to their rule, led to the neglect and deterioration of facilities in these institutions. In Ghana, for instance, the lengthy closure of universities on two different occasions because of student demonstrations against military regimes led to a huge backlog of candidates waiting to be admitted to the

universities in the 1980s and 1990s. The return of political stability led to reforms in their economies mainly inspired by donor countries and agencies such as the World Bank. African governments thus took radical measures, including the liberalization of the hitherto state-controlled higher education sector, to make room for private participation in provision. Indeed, since 2000, about a third of the roughly 300 universities in Sub-Saharan Africa had been established and funded by private providers (Materu, 2007).

As a consequence of the liberalization of provision of higher education, many African governments established regulatory bodies to accredit and ensure the maintenance of minimum standards of quality in all higher education institutions, both public- and private-owned (Materu & Righetti, 2010). This was to ensure harmonization with global trends by maintaining comparability, and therefore, continued recognition of qualifications and awards worldwide.

### **7.3 Theoretical Perspectives**

The study relies on neo-institutional theory to explain the motivation for higher education institutions' adoption of prescribed measures to keep them legitimate and competitive. Briefly, this theory identifies professional mechanisms by which systems of organizations become more and more alike or "isomorphic" (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002). Isomorphism is defined as importing and internalizing approved processes, techniques, ceremonies, and ideas from the external environment. The concept is often associated with organizational success and can convince external and internal monitors of the organization's capability of change and readiness to modify its course by adopting externally approved structures and activities (Bloland, 1994).

The theory postulates that organizations constantly seek to maintain a fit between their practices and practices in the environment regarded as legitimate by the prevailing norms and values (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Scott, 1983). Organizations conforming to the collective normative order, which isomorphism brings, increase their ability to attract the flow of societal resources and enhance their "long-run survival prospects" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 252). The chances of gaining, maintaining and increasing legitimacy, by an organization, are greatly enhanced under isomorphism. With the cardinal role

legitimacy plays in the educational enterprise, how it is won or lost is crucial for the survival and continuation of educational organizations and for the operations of education in general (Bloland, 1994).

Changes brought about by isomorphism occur through three mechanisms: coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991b, p. 67). Coercive isomorphism emanates from sources such as governments, funding sources and organizations that can influence the legitimation of other organizations and their practices. In mimetic isomorphism, organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field of operation that they perceive to be more legitimate or more successful. Normative isomorphism stems primarily from professional networks (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). State-of-the-art practices disseminated through professional associations, conferences and journals, and through associations are some of the mechanisms through which normative isomorphism is acquired (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The regulatory framework for setting up and operating both public and private universities in Ghana clearly brings the concept of coercive isomorphism to bear on that venture. The legal instruments – Act 744 (2007) operationalized by the Legislative Instrument 1984 (2010) – not only prescribe that all such institutions and their programmes must be assessed and accredited before commencing operations, but also prescribe sanctions for failing to do so. An institution's legitimacy, whether public or private, as a legal entity thus hinges on its compliance with the tenets of coercive isomorphism. This comes with incentives such as attraction of good students and staff and funding from various sources.

It appears possible that an institution will experience all three forms of isomorphism in an overlapping manner, in their quest for legitimacy in their operations. For instance, in addition to direct coercive isomorphism inherent in the legislative framework, the accreditation procedure implicitly sees the public universities as the norm by requiring the private institutions to affiliate with them (normative isomorphism). This requirement compels them to comply with conditions set by the mentor institutions before graduands from the private universities could be awarded qualifications (coercive isomorphism). Both the mentorship procedures and the private universities' quest for speedy accreditation are compelling factors for

those institutions to readily adopt recommendations from assessment panels (made up of professors appointed mainly from the public universities). These recommendations, no doubt, would be along the experiences acquired by the mentors and evaluators from their regular places of work – the public universities. Adopting and implementing the evaluators' recommendations, therefore, would necessarily result in the modelling of the private universities along the operations of the public universities (mimetic isomorphism).

The accreditation procedure exerts a lot of pressure on the universities to do more research, publish their findings in refereed journals, and contribute papers at scholarly conferences and workshops. The procedure also insists on moderation of programmes and examinations by external examiners, as well as on the periodic importation of the services of foreign evaluators for accreditation exercises. These measures exert normative isomorphic pressures mainly through the exchange of ideas on current best practices in the institutions. These provide an impetus for normative pressure on the universities to comply with accreditation procedures even if only to project themselves internationally.

The extent to which mimetic isomorphism exerts pressure, especially, on the public universities to comply with accreditation procedures is yet to be determined. However, experience indicates that academics favourably disposed to accreditation measures are usually those with one or more qualifications acquired from western higher education institutions. By inference, such academics would wish their institutions to adopt practices - considered modern and superior - along the lines of those of their foreign alma mater (mimetic isomorphism).

#### **7.4 Research Questions**

To guide the analysis of the differential impacts accreditation measures have had on the public and private universities in Ghana, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. Were there differences in scores between the two cycles of assessments for accreditation?
2. How did the existence of any such differences vary between the public and the private universities?



3. Could the differences in scores between the public and private universities be accounted for by different isomorphic pressures exerted on each category of institution?

## **7.5 Research Methodology**

The participating institutions in the study were seven of the nine state and four of the forty private universities. These were the oldest institutions in each category, which agreed to participate in the study. They also had programmes of study that had undergone two cycles of assessments between 2006 and 2011.

Secondary data on the assessments were first collected from 54 study programme evaluation reports of the sampled universities. Evaluators' assessments from five key indicators, which must meet the accreditation procedure's minimum standards in order for a study programme to be accredited were analysed statistically using the median as a measure of central tendency to describe the general performance of institutions. These indicators were curriculum structure, student/staff ratio, library facilities, physical facilities and funding. Further verification of the significance of the results of the median scores was done using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test to test for differences between the outcomes of the evaluation of the same indicators recorded at the different times. The paired sample *t*-test was used to compare aggregate changes in the indicators (as a measure of accreditation impact) between the two assessment periods, and also between the public and private universities.

The next stage involved eliciting the views (through questionnaires) of all 288 academics, who had taught during the two assessment periods, on their perception of changes that had occurred in the indicators between the two periods. Two hundred and two (out of the 288) academics could be reached. Based on the relative sizes of the institutions, 147 academics from the selected public universities were invited to provide responses to questionnaires designed to elicit their views. Eighty-two (56%) of them provided responses. Fifty-five academics were similarly invited from the private universities, out of whom 43 (78%) provided responses. It had been made clear to respondents that this study was an independent project – not connected with the accreditation agency – and the academics were free to agree or

decline to participate. One hundred and twenty-five (125) academics in total provided responses to the questionnaire – a response rate of 62%.

## **7.6 Results from the analysis of the assessment reports**

The accreditation procedure in Ghana requires universities to meet threshold standards in the five key indicators in order to be accredited. The scores provide information on the changes that occurred in each of the indicators – deterioration, improvement or maintenance of the status quo -in the second cycle assessment from what was observed during the first cycle. The results are then compared between the public and private universities.

Two indicators - curriculum and library facilities – had a median score of two, interpreted as ‘good’ in both cycles of the assessments (see Table 7-1). This suggests that there was no change – improvement or deterioration - in the two indicators between the two assessment periods. On the other hand, the student/staff ratio (SSR) improved from ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ (for a median score of **1**) while the score for funding declined from ‘excellent’ to ‘good’. Physical facilities scored ‘excellent’ for both cycles of assessment. The mean value for the aggregated score, which defined the overall performance as measured by the evaluation process for the first assessment, was **1.73** but deteriorated marginally to **1.81** in the second assessment. Statistically, there was no difference in the scores between the two cycles of assessments ( $p>.05$ ).

For public universities, the scores for curriculum and funding indicated ‘good’ (2) for both assessment periods but improved from ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ for student/staff ratios and library facilities. Physical facilities on the other hand indicated ‘excellent’ (1) for both cycles. This led to a significant improvement - from 1.87 to 1.65 - in the overall assessment scores in the reports - ( $t=-2.199, p<.05$ ).

While private universities, interestingly, had the same median scores for student/staff ratios, library and physical facilities, those for curriculum and funding deteriorated from ‘good’ (2) to ‘satisfactory’ (3). Consequently, the overall assessment scores in the indicators deteriorated from 1.72 in the first assessment to 1.83 in the second assessment, albeit insignificantly ( $t=-.98, p>.05$ ).

Finally, a single test comparing the two-cycle aggregated assessment scores between the two categories of universities indicated a significant

difference ( $t=2.18$ ,  $p=.03<.05$ ), with the public universities achieving better scores (improvement).

*Table 7-1*  
*Performance indicators compared over time*

Assessed indicators in 1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycles of assessment		General		Public		Private	
		M	Z (p-value)	M	Z ((p-value)	M	Z ((p-value)
Curriculum	- 1 <sup>st</sup>	2	-.888 <sup>p</sup> (.374)	2	-.849 <sup>q</sup> (.396)	2	-1.872 <sup>p</sup> (.061)
	- 2 <sup>nd</sup>	2		2		3	
SSR	- 1 <sup>st</sup>	2	-1.773 <sup>q</sup> (.076)	2	-1.593 <sup>q</sup> (.111)	2	-.832 <sup>q</sup> (.405)
	- 2 <sup>nd</sup>	1		1		1	
Library	- 1 <sup>st</sup>	2	-1.526 <sup>q</sup> (.127)	2	-2.023 <sup>q</sup> (.043)*	2	-.111 <sup>q</sup> (.912)
	- 2 <sup>nd</sup>	2		1		1	
Funding	- 1 <sup>st</sup>	2	-.765 <sup>q</sup> (.444)	2	-1.577 <sup>q</sup> (.115)	2	-.728 <sup>p</sup> (.467)
	- 2 <sup>nd</sup>	1		2		3	
Physical	- 1 <sup>st</sup>	1	-.200 <sup>q</sup> (.841)	1	-.707 <sup>q</sup> (.480)	1	-.243 <sup>p</sup> (.808)
Facilities	- 2 <sup>nd</sup>	1		1		1	
<b>Aggregate Score</b>	- 1 <sup>st</sup>		<b>1.733 <sup>a</sup></b> <b>(t=-.966,p&gt;.05)</b>		<b>1.87 <sup>a</sup>;</b> <b>(t=-2.199,p&lt;.05)</b>		<b>1.72 <sup>a</sup>;</b> <b>(t=-.982,p&gt;.05)</b>
	- 2 <sup>nd</sup>		<b>1.807 <sup>a</sup></b>		<b>1.65 <sup>a</sup></b>		<b>1.83 <sup>a</sup></b>
Change in Assessment of programmes (1 <sup>st</sup> - 2 <sup>nd</sup> )		Public		Mean = 1.0645		t = 2.175(.034)	
		Private		Mean = -.5652			

**NB:** using the Wilcoxon test (W), z scores computed by Central limit theorem, are based on the difference: 2nd assessment minus 1st assessment

M = Median score

<sup>p</sup> Based on negative ranks.

<sup>q</sup> Based on positive ranks.

<sup>a</sup> Values are mean values

\* Significant at  $\alpha=.05$  (2-tail)

## 7.7 Results from the academics' survey

This section presents the opinions of academics, in the two categories of institutions, on the extent of implementation of evaluators' recommended measures for improvement and their main motivation for

doing so. The academics' perception is expected to reflect the impact of accreditation on the two institutional categories. It must be noted that, while the assessments of three of the indicators – curriculum, student/staff ratio and library facilities were carried out by evaluators who are also academics, those for the two other indicators – funding and physical facilities – were done by professionals (accountants and architects, respectively) who were not necessarily academics. A question on the hiring of additional staff was also asked to provide further verification of efforts being made by the institutions to implement evaluators' suggestions for improvement of the student/staff ratios. A question on additional teaching and learning materials relates to physical facilities, which directly aid and enhance teaching and learning. These include projectors, screens and power generators (in a country where power supply can be erratic).

### **7.8 Implementation of Evaluators' Recommendations.**

Almost the same proportion of respondent academics from the two categories of universities – private (78%) and public universities (76%) – claimed that their respective institutions had fully implemented evaluators' recommendations for the improvement of their curriculum structures (see Table 7-2). However, proportionately more respondents from private universities (12%) indicated that their institutions had not implemented the recommendations as compared to those from the public institutions (6%).

There was a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between respondents' opinions on the matter of full implementation of recommendations for the improvement of student/staff ratios by the private, as opposed to, the public university academics. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents from private universities indicated full implementation of recommendations on student/staff ratios as opposed to 20% from the public universities. More respondents from public universities (62%) than those from private universities (42%) indicated partial implementation of recommendations on the student/staff ratios. More academics from private universities (22%) submitted that their institutions had not implemented the evaluators' recommendations on student/staff ratios than their counterparts from the public universities (18%).

A significantly ( $p < .01$ ) larger number of respondents from the private (68%) than public (31%) universities indicated that recommendations for the hiring of additional teaching staff (to improve the student/staff ratios) had been implemented in their institutions. More academics from public universities (48%) perceived partial implementation, in comparison to those from private universities (12%). Almost equal proportions of academics in both private and public universities indicated that their institutions had not implemented recommendations on recruitment of additional teaching staff.

More than half of academics from private universities (59%) stated that their institutions had improved on the stock and relevance of library materials, compared to a significantly lower proportion of academics from the public universities (34%) ( $p < .01$ ). Partial implementation of this measure, however, saw a reversal in results, with more academics from public universities indicating improvement than those from the private universities.

The responses indicated an almost equal distribution with regard to the implementation of recommendations on the provision of teaching and learning aids. Thirty-one per cent of academics from public universities as against 36% of those from private universities stated that their institutions had implemented the recommendations in full; while a larger proportion from both categories of institutions, (52% public and 47% private) responded that the recommendations had been partially implemented.

If we are to deduce the impact of accreditation from the extent of implementation of recommendations by the evaluators, then the results show that the private universities had done more than their public university counterparts had.

*Table 7-2*

*Implementation of evaluators' recommendations for improvement.*

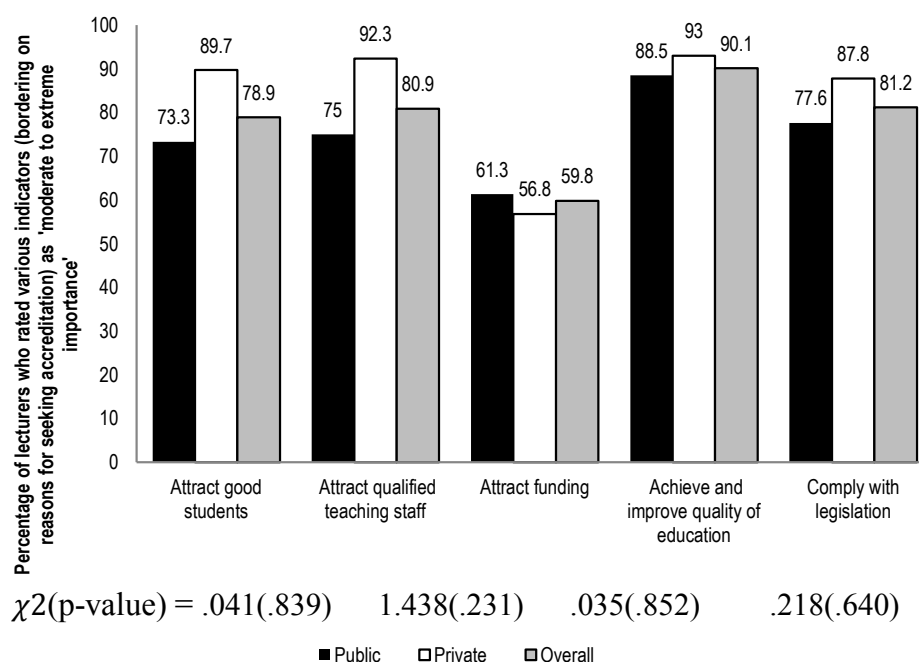
Feature	Response	Ownership		Total	Test of proportions (considering only Yes)	
		Public	Private			
A Curriculum structure,	Yes	50 (76%)	32 (78%)	<b>82</b>	.507	(.476)
	Partially	12 (18%)	4 (10%)	<b>16</b>		
	No	4 (6%)	5 (12%)			
		66	41	<b>107</b>		

Feature	Response	Ownership		Total	Test of proportions (considering only Yes)	
		Public	Private			
B Student-staff ratio,	Yes	13 (20%)	15 (37%)	28	4.364	(.037)*
	Partially	41 (62%)	17 (42%)	58		
	No	12 (18%)	9 (22%)	21		
		66	41	107		
C Recruitment of additional teaching staff	Yes	20 (31%)	28 (68%)	48	15.535	(.000)*
	Partially	31 (48%)	5 (12%)	36		
	No	13 (20%)	8 (20%)	21		
		64	41	105		
D Improvement of the stock and relevance of library materials	Yes	22 (34%)	24 (59%)	46	7.397	(.007)*
	Partially	35 (54%)	12 (29%)	47		
	No	8 (12%)	5 (12%)	13		
		65	41	106		
E Provision of other teaching and learning aids	Yes	19 (31%)	13 (36%)	32	.271	(.603)
	Partially	32 (52%)	17 (47%)	49		
	No	11 (18%)	6 (17%)	17		
		62	36	98		

\* Test (Chi-square) is significant at 5% significance level

## 7.9 Reasons for Seeking Accreditation

The study requested academics from the public and private universities to provide the main reasons for seeking accreditation from listed options. Figure 7-1 shows the results for the two categories of universities. The responses were expected to give an idea of the type of isomorphic pressure experienced by each category of institution that drove it to seek accreditation.



*Figure 7-1 Reasons for seeking accreditation*

Note: chi-square (X) on the differences in academics' views on the various indicators.

Sixty per cent of all respondents generally, perceived accreditation as an attraction for funding. A higher proportion also shared the view that accreditation was important in attracting good students (79%), qualified teaching staff (81%), for improvement in quality education (90%) and as a form of compliance with legislation (81%).

Academics from the private universities attached greater importance to four of these factors. However, although those who held these views may have been higher in proportion compared to those in the public universities, the chi-square statistics show that there are no significant differences ( $p > .05$ ). A larger proportion of public university academics (61%) saw the attraction of funding through accreditation as of more importance than their private university counterparts (57%). However, this difference was not statistically significant either. Good students for enrolment into their institutions than the public universities (73%).

In the case of teaching staff, more private university academics (92%) found accreditation as a good attraction for well-qualified and experienced staff than their public university counterparts (75%).

A higher number of public university academics (61%) saw the attraction of funding through accreditation as of much more importance

than their private university counterparts (57%). With regard to achieving and improving quality education, a higher percentage of private university academics (93%) perceived this factor as a good motivation for seeking accreditation than those from the public universities (89%).

Finally, more private university academics (88%), than those in the public universities (78%), indicated the perception that their institutions had only complied with accreditation measures as an obligation under the law.

## **7.10 Discussion and Conclusion**

The analysis of the public universities indicated a mixture of fortunes, in terms of the scores, in the indicators between the two rounds of assessments. Three of the indicators - curriculum, funding and physical facilities - maintained the status quo while two others – student/staff ratios and library facilities – showed an improvement over the first assessment. Statistically, the public universities exhibited a significant improvement - from 1.87 to 1.65 - in the overall assessment scores in the reports.

The private universities, on the other hand, maintained the status quo for three of their indicators - student/staff ratios, library and physical facilities - while those for curriculum and funding declined slightly from ‘good’ to ‘satisfactory’. Their overall rating in the indicators deteriorated from 1.72, in the first assessment, to 1.83 in the second assessment, albeit this change was statistically insignificant.

To answer the first research question, therefore, we would state that, while some of the assessed indicators maintained their values, from the first-cycle to the second-cycle assessments, there were changes –for better or for worse– in the values achieved in the other assessed indicators. These occasioned differences in the aggregated scores between the two cycles of assessments for accreditation.

The answer to the second question follows from this. When we compare the aggregated performance for the two-cycles of assessments of the indicators for both categories of universities, we conclude that the public universities showed a slight improvement over their private university counterparts.

Given that private universities showed a higher implementation rate of recommendations by panels of evaluators, and yet had an inferior



score in the assessments for accreditation, one could infer a number of possible explanations. These explanations do not contradict the expectations from neo-institutional theories, because we did not see that all higher education institutions followed the (coercive) pressure to be accredited. First, it is possible that suggestions from the foreign evaluators, which the private universities did not have access to, worked to the advantage of the public universities. The accrediting body in Ghana usually engaged independent foreign evaluators to join local ones to assess the programmes of public universities. This was to ensure that a more objective report was produced from the assessment exercise, as most of the local evaluators were alumni of those universities. The measure also ensured comparability of quality with programmes outside Ghana. In addition, public universities might have started from a higher level of educational standards, as they had had exposure to international environments and expectations over a much longer period. Second, it could mean that the implementation strategies, of suggestions for improvement, by the private universities were weak because private universities in Ghana were mostly organised very 'lean' to provide routine undergraduate education. Their often-heavy reliance on part-time teaching staff did not make for enough commitment towards institutional development and support (e.g. in building capacity for a quality assurance unit).

The programme evaluation reports could result in the exacting of sanctions against institutions that went against the norms of the accreditation procedure. This coercive isomorphic pressure held for both categories of institutions. Apart from this particular threat of sanction, it would not be easy to determine from the assessment reports what informed the reasons for the institutions' compliance with the accreditation measures. The follow-up survey of the academics' opinions, however, provided hints of such reasons – attracting good students, funding, qualified teaching staff and the achievement and maintenance of quality education.

The perspectives of respondents on the implementation of recommendations make for an interesting analysis. From the results on curriculum structure, for instance, one sees that the percentage of respondents from both categories of institutions who thought they had been implemented was quite high (Table 7-2). The inference is that both categories of institutions attached high importance to compliance with

the norm. Indeed, both categories of institutions met the expectations of the evaluators, according to the scores in the assessment reports on the curriculum indicator (Table 7-1). The deduction here is that all academics –evaluators and course lecturers– realised that the curriculum indicator was cardinal in the teaching and learning process in the university institution. Evaluators therefore, might not recommend accreditation for a programme with a very weak curriculum structure. This may count as coercive pressure on universities but at the level of individual academics, normative isomorphic pressures could be added. Academics, after all, want to think of themselves as ‘world citizens’ on the ‘planet of academia’. Being unable to perform a basic responsibility required of such citizens (good curricula) might dent the image of such academics before their peers.

The results on the implementation of measures to achieve acceptable student/staff ratios in both categories of institutions were not that encouraging (Table 7-2). The private universities, however, appeared to be making better efforts (37% of respondents) than their public university counterparts (20%) in the implementation of measures to achieve the acceptable norm. In one such measure – recruitment of additional staff - the public universities trailed their private university counterparts (31-68%) in their respective respondents’ perception of efforts being made. We must concede that, as respondents were making judgements about their own institutions, an element of subjectivity in their responses could not be discounted. It must, however, be emphasised that, unlike the public universities which enjoyed better security in terms of conditions of service, the private universities needed accreditation to attract any semblance of qualified staff. The pressure to conform to the norm (coercive isomorphism) was thus real if they were to gain accreditation in order to attain the objective of attracting qualified staff. Indeed, many more of them cited the attraction of good quality staff as a reason for seeking accreditation (Figure 7-1). Yet the public universities, apart from serving as a major source of part-time staff for the private universities, would hardly employ staff whose quality fell below the threshold standards. This, perhaps, was due to their continuous quest to protect their reputation and rub shoulders with recognised institutions all over the world (normative isomorphism). In contrast with the public universities, the general opinion around the accreditation agency seemed to be that the accreditation procedure had

to be alert to prevent some private universities from committing aberrations in that regard – that is, employing unqualified staff to teach. In the area of attracting students, Ghanaians would normally wish to enrol in the public universities due to the latter's long-established reputation and the subvention they enjoyed from the state. The same goes for qualified academics who wish to lecture in the universities. Private universities, therefore, had to put in extra effort to compete, among themselves, for qualified students who could not enrol in the public system due to lack of adequate facilities. Most of the private universities had, consequently, put up impressive physical and library facilities, in the mould of the public universities (mimetic isomorphism), as an attraction for students.

More respondents (61%) from the public universities than the private universities (57%) cited funding as a reason for seeking accreditation. Both quasi-state agencies (which funded student loans, for instance) and foreign donors (of whom public universities were major beneficiaries) required the universities to be accredited in order for benefits to be extended to them. Public universities mainly subsisted on state resources, which had been dwindling over the years. It would have been near suicidal on their part to refuse to conform to measures that would put them in good standing with the accreditation procedure, as that would have deprived them of the required extra resources that they so badly needed to enable them run effectively and efficiently. They thus had to bow to the coercive isomorphic pressures, which the accreditation measures brought, in that respect. The private universities are mainly for-profit institutions and were permitted to charge 'realistic' fees to recoup their investments and make a profit. The main – coercive isomorphic – pressure they had to contend with was to seek accreditation in order to attract students who were in a position to pay 'realistic fees'. They therefore, had a narrower objective for seeking accreditation than the public universities, as far as the funding indicator was concerned.

The study concludes that the private universities, more than the public universities, by reason of legislation and the accreditation procedure's processes, had to contend with all the isomorphic pressures – coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism – in compliance with the accreditation measures. These pressures, in the main, were exerted simultaneously and in an overlapping manner. For instance, by

compelling the private universities to affiliate to the established public universities, the accreditation procedure had accepted, de facto, that the latter institutions' norms should serve as reference points for the private ones. Using evaluators from the public universities to assess private universities' programmes adds to this. Additionally, the mentor institutions, in awarding their qualifications to graduands of the private institutions, require the latter to 'mimic' most their practices. Thus, all three isomorphic pressures are experienced by the private universities in their quest to be in good standing with the accreditation procedure. These come in the form of complying with legislation (coercive isomorphism), accepting the norms as established by the mentor institutions and the accreditation procedure (normative isomorphism) and copying the ways of their mentors (mimetic isomorphism).

In the case of the public universities, the isomorphic pressures that informed their reasoning for complying with accreditation measures were mainly coercive (legislation). This is followed by normative isomorphism through compliance with the broad norms of the accreditation procedure and their interaction with foreign compatriots and literature. To a lesser degree, mimetic isomorphic pressure is exerted on them in their quest to copy best practices from elsewhere to make them internationally competitive - to attract foreign students, for instance.